



County of Los Angeles
DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

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November 21, 2003

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To: Supervisor Yvonne Brathwaite Burke, Chair
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From: David Sanders, Ph.D.
Director, Department of Children and Family Services

Richard Shumsky
Chief Probation Officer, Probation Department

**AUGUST 26, 2003 BOARD AGENDA ITEM #17 RE: EDUCATION COORDINATING COUNCIL
AND EDUCATION UNIT**

On August 26, 2003, your Board instructed the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and the Probation Department, in collaboration with the Children's Law Center, to convene a workgroup that included, but was not limited to, representatives from Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) and other school districts, the judiciary, California Youth Connection, Commission on Children and Families, Probation Commission, Children's Planning Council, Los Angeles City Commission on Children and Families, foster caregiver groups, Public Defender and District Attorney. The Departments were to report back in 90 days on the workgroup's recommendations regarding:

1. The feasibility of creating an Education Coordinating Council, to address the education needs of foster and probation youth, including a proposed model; and
2. The development of a new Education Unit within the DCFS or a joint Education unit between the DCFS and Probation.

1. The Education Coordinating Council

The workgroup, consisting of representatives from the above-mentioned agencies and organizations, met several times over the past 90 days and determined the creation of an Education Coordinating Council to address the educational needs of foster and probation youth was feasible and critically necessary.

The composition of the group should include the key *leaders* from the various groups and organizations involved in the education of foster youth, to ensure that policy can be set and decisions made.

The head of the following groups, or a high level designate of that leader, should sit on the Council:

- LAUSD, LACOE and representatives from the five school districts with the largest representation of foster youth
 - DCFS
 - The Judiciary
 - Children's Law Center
 - LA County Children's Commission
 - LA County Probation Department
 - LA County Probation Commission
 - Department of Mental Health
 - Children's Planning Council
 - Los Angeles City Commission on Children and Families
 - California Youth Connection
 - LA County Public Defender
 - LA County District Attorney
 - Southern California Association for Philanthropy ("SCAP")
 - Juvenile Court Bar Association (counsel for parents)
 - First Five Commission
 - Court Appointed Special Advocates ("CASA")
 - Relative caregiver representative
 - Foster Youth Services
 - Foster Caregiver representative
- The Council should consider within its first year (a) how to formalize its structure (whether through a joint powers agreement or some other arrangement), and (b) how to make the group financially self sufficient over time.
 - The group should not be too large in number, to ensure that free flowing, frank, and productive discussions can occur.
 - As issues arise, the Coordinating Council may wish to form working groups to address particular issues and report back to the larger group. The Coordinating Council should

also consider whether a smaller steering or executive committee is needed to guide the group's work.

- The group should schedule regular meetings with sufficient frequency to enable there to be a forum for discussion of issues as they arise.
- The representatives should seek input from, and serve as a vehicle for communication with, each of their constituent organizations or groups.
- The group will be created with the joint cooperation of the City, County, school, and Judicial organizations and agencies it is to include. Reports will go to all appropriate governing bodies. Moreover, it will be important to ensure that the group meets with and reports to the heads of all the governing bodies on a periodic basis (perhaps every six or twelve months).

Key Issues Still to Be Resolved are:

- Staffing of the Coordinating Council; and,
- Start up funding

Attached is a detailed report describing the history as well as the overall concept and structure of the proposed Education Coordinating Council (See Attachment A).

2. DCFS Education Unit

Further, the workgroup discussed the development of a new Education Unit within DCFS or a joint Education Unit between DCFS and Probation. It was determined that DCFS would develop a new Education Unit primarily independent of Probation. While both populations are underachieving academically, need educational assessments upon entering their respective systems, and wrestle with literacy, the nature of the school placements tend to differ.

Dependent youth largely attend schools within the community in the 81 school districts in Los Angeles County. They are usually placed in foster and relative caregiver homes with a smaller percent in group homes. DCFS struggles with creating workable and responsive policy and procedure with each of the 81 school districts to access and transfer education records, craft effective enrollment and disenrollment procedures, as well as ensuring and maintaining school and placement stability, and calculating and transferring school credits.

Probation youth attend schools within the camps and halls under the jurisdiction of LACOE. A smaller number of youth are placed in group homes or other community placements and generally attend non-public schools. It is with the group home and suitably youth that the two agencies agreed to work collaboratively.

The objectives of the DCFS Education Unit are to improve the educational outcomes for children under the jurisdiction of the Department in order to enhance their chances of achieving productive adult lives. The Unit will need to work collaboratively with school districts, the judiciary, the children's attorneys and advocates in order to achieve its goals.

Currently there are approximately 40,000 children serviced by the Department.

- 24% or 9,300 of preschool age between 0 and 5 years;
- 48% or 20,000 children attending elementary and middle school between the ages of 6 and 12 years; and,
- 28% or 11,700 children attending high school between 13 and 18+ years of age.

The objectives have been divided into focus areas to best identify the needs and work involved to achieve desired outcomes. They are child and Department specific.

Child Specific

To improve the educational outcomes for children in the Department's care by focusing on each child's schooling and educational needs by:

- Assessing each child's educational level upon detention and taking appropriate school and/or program placement action;
- Insuring quick and effective school process procedures are accomplished, such as, enrollment and disenrollment, locating and transferring school records and transcripts, and, coursework credit being appropriately recorded;
- Developing school readiness skills that promote language, cognitive, social and emotional development;
- Developing academic skills with an emphasis on literacy;
- Insuring direct educational services such as preschool, tutoring, academic mentoring, educational/vocational and life skill resources are made available;
- Tracking school performance;
- Actively overseeing, in partnership with the parents and/or caregivers, each child's education and interceding when problems are detected.

Department Specific

Improve the educational outcomes for children in the Department's care by developing educational support within each regional office and enhancing the staff's awareness of the importance of addressing each child's school and educational needs. Administratively addressing, advocating and providing resources to insure educational concerns are adequately addressed within the Department. This goals will be achieved by:

- Providing at least one fulltime Education Specialist or the equivalent in each regional office to serve as educational advocates by assisting Children's Social Workers (CSW) to insure children are being educationally assessed upon detention, placed in the

appropriate grade or program, insuring quick and effective school process procedures are accomplished such as enrollment and disenrollment, locating, transferring and accessing of school records and transcripts, and, the appropriately recording of coursework credit;

- Supporting the Education Specialist with a “CASA-like” volunteer program staffed with retired school personnel to create mini-education units within each regional office;
- Providing training for the Supervising Children’s Social Workers (SCSW) and CSWs on the educational rights of children, the importance of advocating educationally for children, how to identify special education needs, how to navigate the school system, the importance of utilizing the Health and Education Passport, new legislation involving educational benefits and mandates for children, etc.;
- Advocating for school resources within the 81 school districts;
- Participating in the newly formed Education Coordinating Council and other education based programs;
- Identifying ongoing tutoring and mentoring opportunities;
- Expanding the current university student volunteer program with Azusa Pacific University to include other universities;
- Developing strong working relationships with the top 6 school districts servicing DCFS children;
- Engaging and training the parents and/or caregivers to become involved in their child’s educational endeavors;
- Working collaboratively with the judiciary, children’s attorneys and advocates to develop efficient and effective policy and legislation to strengthen the educational advantages for foster youth;
- Collaborate with Foster Youth Services and LACOE to provide services for youth residing in group homes;
- Collaborate with Probation to address the educational needs of their group home and suitably placed youth;
- Develop philanthropic relationships and grant support to finance the Department’s Educational goals.

Education Unit Structure

The structure of the unit will be comprised of a manager at the range 10 or 12 level with a strong education background, supported by two Children Service Administrator (CSA) II’s and two CSA I’s. Technical support for tracking needs will be accomplished by an Administrative Assistant II and clerical support by a Secretary III position.

Outside contracting will be relied on heavily either through LACOE and/or Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) or various vendors for additional support of the unit and its objectives. Contracting with various vendors to fill the Education Specialist position may be the most cost effective and efficient way of reaching our objective quickly.

3. Probation Department Education Unit

The Probation Department has approximately 25,000 minors on active probation. Of those, 2125 minors are in camp on any given day; another 2300 are in suitable placement (foster care); 1600 are in juvenile halls and another 19,000 are living in the community under probation supervision. The minors range in age from 12-18 with the majority in the 15-16 year old span. The institution schools are serviced by the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE). LACOE also has schools in the community for probation minors. Many minors on probation in the community attend public schools. The vast majority of the minors function far below grade level for many reasons, lack of attendance, lack of family support and encouragement, and special education needs that have been neglected. The education of all these minors is a high priority for the department and the staff that serve them.

The Probation Department intends to form an Educational Task Force that will be chaired by the Juvenile Consultant. Internal members of the group will include Camp, Hall and Field Bureau staff. Parent and minor representatives will participate. This core group will work with school districts and outside agencies to form avenues for improved transitions and educational planning. The Task Force will also provide direction and monitor the implementation of new educational programming within the department.

The Juvenile Bureaus share educational issues; however, emphasis may be at different ends of the process. It is obvious that more parents and children need to be involved in developing the educational plan for the child no matter what Bureau or school is involved. This is particularly true of minors with special education needs.

The following identifies the areas of emphasis for each Juvenile Probation Bureau:

Camps

- Transition Planning: Minors graduating from camp need assistance getting back in to school in the community. Camp Community Liaison (CCL) staff in the camps work with Camp Community Transition DPOs in the field to assist the minor enrolling in school.
- These same camp teams need to ensure proper class credits and transcripts are transferred to the new community school.
- Minors identified with special education needs shall receive follow up assistance to ensure they are receiving proper classes.
- Literacy is a key element while the minor is in camp. Tutoring classes are available.
- Homework periods are a part of the daily schedule. Meaningful work connected to a study plan should be supplied by the school and monitored by the camp staff.

Juvenile Halls

- Comprehensive assessments should be completed in order to assist camps and placements with a continuous education plan.

- Homework periods are a part of the daily schedule. Meaningful work connected to a study plan should be supplied by the school and monitored by the hall staff.
- Provide tutoring while the minor is detained.

Suitable Placement

- Suitable Placement staff need to work with placement and private schools, parents and minors to ensure proper transitions. This is particularly difficult for minors transferring from one school to another.
- Special Education minors and their families require assistance and support in ensuring minors receive an individualized learning plan.
- Suitable Placement staff need to monitor the grades, progress, attendance and records of minors while they are in placement. Attention needs to be focused on minor's ability to receive proper class credits and classes that are grade appropriate and suitable for the individual minor.
- Staff are to liaison with schools and advocate for the minors and their families.
- Staff shall continue to collaborate with DCFS regarding educational issues in the foster care system.

Community Based

- Staff shall assist minors in enrolling in school. Transitions are particularly troublesome for minors on probation.
- Staff shall advocate for minors as schools sometimes stigmatize probation minors.
- Staff shall assist minors in seeking tutorial services in the community.
- Staff need to monitor the attendance, grades, progress of minors and liaison with schools as needed.

The areas presented above will be supported and monitored by the departmental Education Task Force. This overarching group shall ensure communication with the school districts is available for all staff dealing with minors and their education.

4. Conclusion

The Departments are very excited about the proposed Education Units and working collaborately with our stakeholders to improve educational outcomes for our children.

PVF:PM:pm

Attachments

c: Chief Administrative Officer
Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors
County Counsel
Children's Law Center of Los Angeles